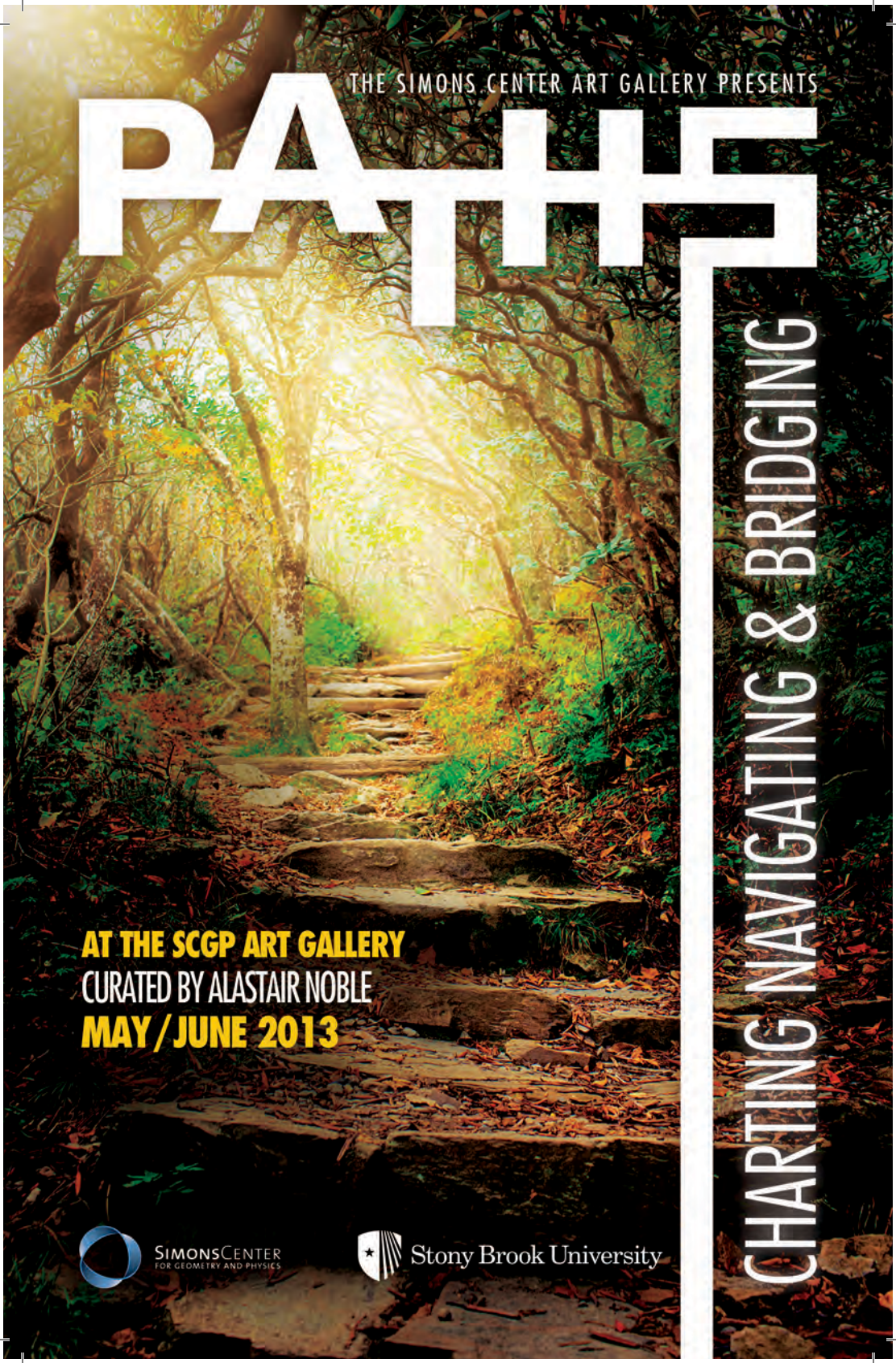

THE SIMONS CENTER ART GALLERY PRESENTS
PATH
CHARTING NAVIGATING & BRIDGING
AT THE SCGP ART GALLERY
CURATED BY ALASTAIR NOBLE
MAY / JUNE 2013
SIMONS CENTER
FOR GEOMETRY AND PHYSICS
Stony Brook University

"I am a wanderer and a mountain climber, he said to his heart; I do not like the plains, and it seems I cannot sit still for long. And whatever may yet come to me as destiny and experience will include some wandering and mountain climbing: in the end, one experiences one's self." Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche.

INTRODUCTION

Paths are trails, tracks, ways, lanes, conduits and more. Paths can follow the topography of the landscape or literally cut through it. How paths are crossed or navigated help to determine an understanding of their character, trajectory and mission.

Swiss mathematician and physicist Euler, in 1735, posed the conundrum of how to cross all seven bridges of Konigsberg without re-crossing any one; this puzzle established the foundation of topology. With the advent of electronic territories, topology, not topography, has played an important role in organizing data into digital maps that chart cyberspace. More recently electronic global mapping techniques employ topology to organize data into digital fluid charts that represent a cyber landscape. In view of globalization, worldwide web and the Internet, physical borders have collapsed. Consequently, contemporary artists have been drawn to re-present data, whether it be geographic, actual or virtual, by presenting alternative approaches to mapping. Examples of such include anything from the earth's landscape, to the DNA sequence of a genome project, to charting the global use of cell phones.

This exhibition brings together a selection of artists who investigate and reveal the characteristics of charting, navigating, and bridging alternative routes to understand space.

THE ARTISTS

Tim Robinson

Jan Estep

The mission of **Tim Robinson** is to map his adopted homeland Connemara, Ireland exemplified in *Oileáin Árann*, a Map of the Aran Islands (1996). Trained as a mathematician, he later became artist writer and cartographer. Robinson has charted Connemara not only by pounding every inch of the land and hills on foot, but also by absorbing its rich history & culture. His practice embraces the traditional Greek notion of "Topography" is "*topos*" place and "*graphein*" to write. In his case, text functions simultaneously with a cartographic chart in revealing a complete empathetic reflection of the landscape. In regard to his map-making quest he writes, *"while walking the land, I am the pen on the paper; while drawing this map, my pen is myself walking the land."*

Filmmaker **Pat Collins** features the work of Tim Robinson in his film, *Tim Robinson: Connemara* (2011). They might well be viewed as kindred souls of sorts; both artists are truly unique in their respective fields sharing as they do, a profound lyrical and heartfelt connection to the Irish landscape, its mythical properties, and the innumerable stories it has to tell us. Their joint sensibilities are described by the filmmaker himself as *"an intersection between writing, filmmaking, and the natural world."*

Complementing Collins film on Robinson perfectly is an earlier experimental short piece, *Pilgrim* (2008), a stunning non-narrative tone poem capturing the annual ascent of Croagh Patrick by hundreds of Catholic pilgrims – a journey that traditionally begins each year in darkness

Edward Batcheller

Edward Batcheller

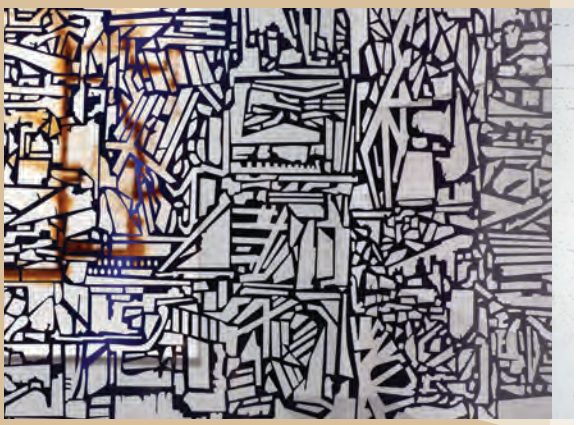
Scott Sherk

Another pilgrimage is documented by an artist / philosopher **Jan Estep** in her film *Searching for Ludwig Wittgenstein,* (2012). This video essay features footage of a trek by Estep, which led her to the remains of a fjord-side hut, built in Norway by Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) as a private place to write. She describes this journey and film in this way *"I originally visited the site hoping to map its location and learn more about Wittgenstein's time there. The voice over narrative describes the search for the hut, which was simultaneously a physical, embodied experience of walking in the woods and a conceptual, interpretive experience of remembering the philosopher's words and ideas".*

Fleeting memories of natural flora appear suspended in the photographic emulsion on the glass plate assemblages in "*Tropography*" by **Edward Batcheller** (2013). These are photograms of birds, tree branches and other vegetation whose forms are left as negative images floating in a filmic mist, suggesting an archived recording from the distant past. These panels record the actual live action of nature, and in some cases the emulsion is even erased by the elements. They are an unadulterated documentation of the activities of the natural environment charting its ways without intervention of lens or other technical devices.

Sixty years ago John Cage brought our attention to the ambient sounds around us with his now famous 1952 composition 4'33". Since then, mapping the sound of the landscape with field recordings by artists has

Paul Fabozzi



Paul Fabozzi

become a genre unto itself. **Scott Sherk** has subsumed this means of understanding space within his practice in works such as *Walk of Shame* (2007). Scherk has been drawn to record the act of walking and the ambient sounds in the city and natural settings. When presented, these field recordings are supplemented by maps and welded steel sculptures that represent the actual pathway of his wanderings. He quotes the cultural critic and author Rebecca Solnit author of Wanderlust: A History of Walking, *"The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts".*

The Internationale Situationistes led by Guy Debord in the 1950s advocated an alternative method to mapping the Paris urban landscape by embracing the act of the dérive (to drift). In other words, a pedestrian was encouraged to release themselves of daily activities and be guided only by the surrounding cityscape on unpredictable paths. This was a way to explore the emotional and behavioral effects of the geographic environment and as a means to reevaluate the urban landscape. The art of **Paul Fabozzi** appears to reverberate with these concepts from his own city meanderings. He has transposed his city walks into paintings, drawings and steel panels of geometric shapes, layered forms, and a multitude of lines with identifiable trajectories. These are charts mapping his mental and physical experience such as *Local Shapes #1(2006).*

Charting journeys further a field are the subject of **Michelle Stuart's**

Michelle Stuart

Cris Gianakos

artistic practice. She has been obsessed with the voyages of Captain James Cook. Her personal charting system identifies specific aspects of his adventures represented in her suite of five etchings, *Navigation Coincidence: Reflecting on the Voyages of Capt. James Cook* (1986), presented in this exhibition. Her own words perhaps best reflect her personal engagement with Cook. *"I have been an avid admirer of the great captain nearly all my adult life… I have traveled most of the world tracing his travels, from his birthplace then to his apprentice place Whitby to Otaheite, Tonga and all the islands, to New Zealand and Australia, to Cook's Inlet, Alaska and lastly to the place of his death in Hawaii"*

The titles of her prints are important to each map and refer to aspects of Cook's life and death, such as his reason for going on the first voyage (to chart the path of the transit of Venus). "Directions for Seamen Bound for Far Voyages" is actually the title of an Admiralty paper that was issued to the Captain and his crew on the first voyage. Of this Stuart says *"can you imagine giving directions to the unknown, the uncharted, to a path that is erased"?*

Unknown trajectories are often suggested by the sculptural structures of artist **Cris Gianakos**. His carefully constructed elegant ramps and bridges are braced with crisscrossing beams and topped with planar platforms. They cut through space projecting upwards into the cosmos. Like the gnomon of a sundial they stand a carefully calibrated

Michael Benson

instrument ready to receive the rays of the sun, just as the observatories of Jantar Mantar (a collection of architectural astronomical instruments, built by Maharaja (King), Jai Singh II). Few of his structures function as pedestrian bridges leaving metaphorical connections to be made. However, he has made exceptions to span and connect one point with another where paths converge. *Marroussi Ramp* (1995) is one such structure built to bridge a quarry 41m long. A dark engraved line is carved cleanly into the landscape as a V shaped channel; its threshold, like his drawings, suggests a void in which to pass into an unknown space. According to Gianakos, the crossing offers the traveler an unexpected auditory encounter with the humming of the wind over the structure mixed with the sound of cicadas. As Heidegger reminds us in Building, Dwelling and Thinking *"The bridge gathers the earth as landscape around…Bridges lead in many ways."*

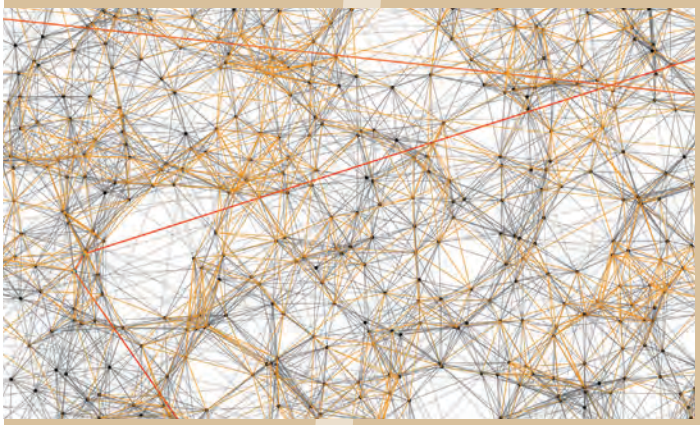
Michael Benson's photographic images evoke strange fictitious landscapes reminiscent of the French Surrealist Yves Tanguy. However, they are actual documents of stars, planets, moons, comets or distant galaxies, as per the example in this exhibition *Comet Tempel 1 After Projectile Impact (Near View) Deep Impact* (2005). The mysteries of the cosmos are revealed in these images evolved from scientific data, which have travelled for light years through space. Through the use of contemporary image processing software, raw data from planetary science databases has been utilized to create seamless images with

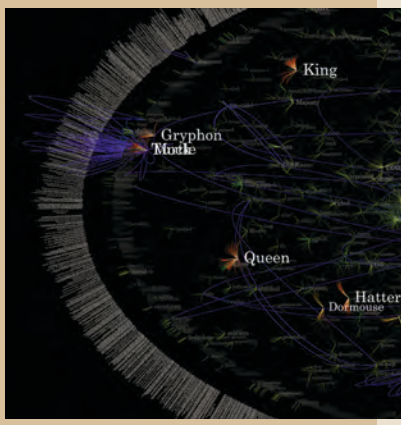
Eve Andrea Laramee

extraordinarily high detail, contrast and print quality. Benson retrieved most of these pictures from deep archives containing tens or even hundreds of thousands of images sent to Earth by five decades of space probe missions; many have never before been seen by the public. Others were taken in already processed form from NASA, ESA or JAXA (Japanese Space Agency) sites, and then further optimized and refined. To quote Benson, *"I have been making the case that apart from its role in scientific research, the visual legacy of 50 years of planetary exploration constitutes an important chapter in the history of photography".*

Trekking and navigating the landscape is the mission of some artists but for others their concern is charting environmental and global issues. Critical to **Eve Andrea Laramee's** practice is the manner in which cultures use science and art to map out their beliefs. She draws attention to the overlapping areas and interconnections between artistic expression and scientific investigations and at the same time considers the folly of human intervention. Several of her projects address very serious environmental issues such as "*Uranium Decay* (2006)," a video which tracks the invisible traces of radioactive isotopes through the uranium decay cycle enveloping the viewer in rich sensuous colour to such a degree that the issue of radiotoxic pollution become forgotten. In her words,

" 'Uranium Decay' responds to nuclear accidents and radiotoxic pollution, by illuminating the 4.47 billion-year half-life decay cycle of uranium-238 superimposed onto thermographs and news footage. As uranium decays over geological time, it transmutes into "uranium daughters" that cascade into other elements and finally to stable



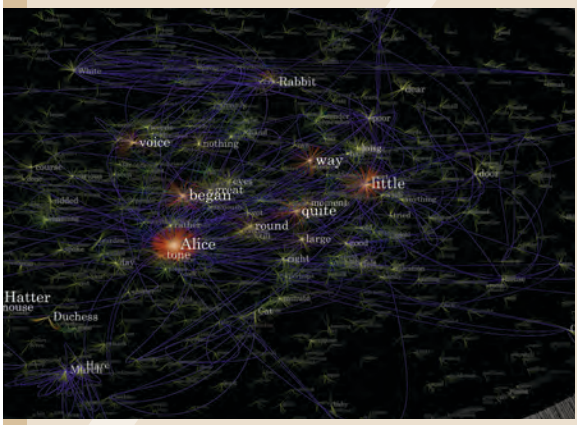


Brian Evans **W. Brad Paley**

Lead-206. As we are learning post-Fukushima, when climate change occurs and vulnerability spectrums shift, nuclear sites and the life forms surrounding them are at increased risk"

Brian Evans is an artist and electronic musician who traces the structures and processes of our neural networks through video imaging. He describes his digital print pensée perdu (2011) as, *"computational, visualizing topographies of networks that model the structure of our brains and the structure of our culture. Parsing a network from source to target is all about finding our way—from problem to solution, person to person, here to home. We find our way through a small world, a network of incestuous links and a little randomness. It's path finding through myriad maps. And as behavior follows structure, it's not surprising that the intricacies of our lives mirror the filagreed arbors of our neural forests".*

W. Brad Paley employs topological systems to his mapping techniques. Paley describes himself as an artist and "interaction" designer whose focus in both worlds is the visual interpretation of patterns hidden in information. His work has three primary goals: to create visual filters which let different subjects express their differences; to make the work readable enough that the viewer can gain specific insights; and to reveal complexity in a way that's matched to human perceptual abilities. His visual representations are inspired by the calm but richly layered information in natural scenes. This approach is

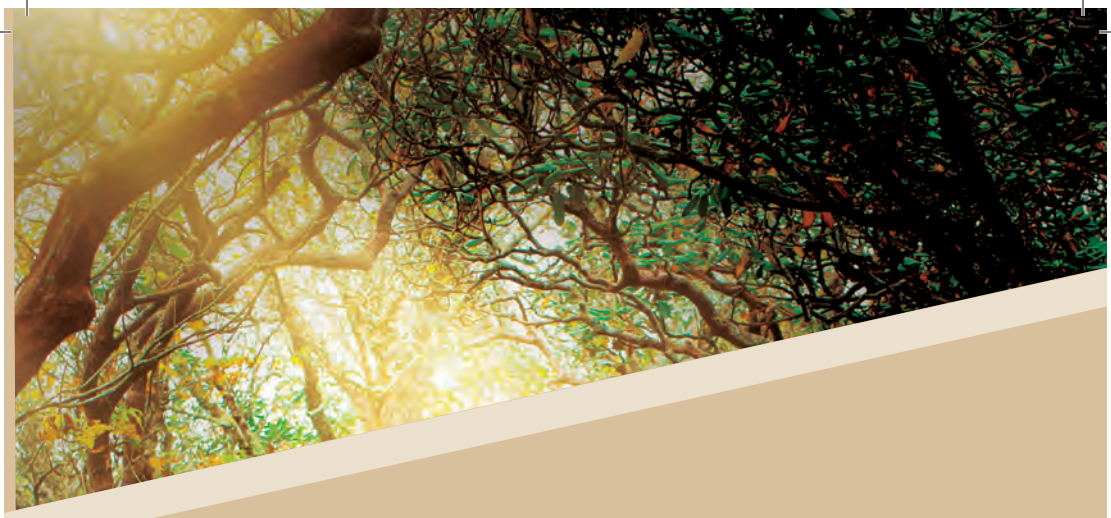


Jeni Wightman

exemplified in the two prints *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland TextArc* (2001-2010) and *CodeProfiles* (2002) that represent two interactive coded projections that trace and reveal the text in endless ways.

Charting environmental changes is the aim of **Jeni Wightman** a trained biologist turned artist. *"This dynamic flux between matter and energy informs my artistic exploration… I try to capture the visual language in biologic processes that mark the embodiment of time". In her Portraits of NYC* (2012) she features a small selection of transforming colourfields, which she captured from polluted NYC waterways. In *Transect* 2012 she transposes sample from the forest floor into a bacterial colourfield. This is a play on the abstract expressionist term and a natural environmental reference. She took mud samples from several areas around New York City that were transferred into sealed glass vitrines. The bacteria in these samples were encouraged to grow by the use of heat lamps, resulting in visible organically growing matter that changes colour and shape continuously during its decomposition. These may appear like colourfield paintings however they are growing maps of organic action, presenting stratifications of a bacterial landscape.

The artists chosen for this exhibition are of a diverse nature and represent a wide selection of mediums but are bound by a common approach to explore and experience new and old pathways. Some employ intuitive physical approaches while others have a scientific or mathematical background in devising alternative networks.



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